



BOOK REVIEWS

Japan at War in the Pacific: The Rise and Fall of The Japanese Empire in Asia 1868–1945

By Jonathan Clements. 351 pp. Rutland, VT, Tuttle Publishing, 2022.

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Japan at War in the Pacific is a welcome addition to the small number of English-language books that chronicle imperial Japan's wars from 1868 through to 1945. It ably synthesises existing scholarship for a non-specialist audience. Author Jonathan Clements's incisive summaries, instructive anecdotes, and up-to-date bibliography render this book as highly recommended for an academic readership as well. *Japan at War* does not put forth explicit arguments that distinguish it from other monographs. Nonetheless, the choice of time frame and emphasis on the cultural aspects of Japanese militarism place *Japan at War* firmly in the 'long-view' camp of written work about the Asia-Pacific War (1937–45).¹ This work argues that 'the transformation of Japan into a militarist power began decades earlier [than the 1930s], with the toppling of the old samurai regime, and the rush of the formerly isolated nation onto the world stage' (p. 24).

Clements dedicates about one-sixth of his exposition to the 'Pacific War', narrowly defined as the battles that Japan fought against Australia, China, England, the Netherlands, and the USA from late 1941 through to mid-1945. If one adopts the 'Asia-Pacific War' framework, which pushes the start date of the war back to 7 July 1937, about a third of Clements's narrative (86 pages) is spent on Japan in World War II. Readers of military history might wonder whether such a complex, geographically expansive, and destructive enterprise can be fruitfully described in so few pages. Its brevity notwithstanding, Clements's book is a contribution to knowledge. Although *Japan at War* does not provide detailed accounts of the local populations, topographies, climates, logistics, and weaponry that defined the battle spaces and zones of military occupation in World War II, it skilfully addresses a question of great importance—namely why imperial Japanese armed forces were able to sustain military offensives of unprecedented scope and ferocity in the early 1940s despite the fact that Japan was far behind its foes in the areas of technology, political cohesion, and wealth well into the early twentieth century.

Clements attempts to solve this riddle by tracing the genesis of 1930s Japanese militarism back to the 1850s. In the introduction of the book, he presents Japanese armed aggression as a largely reactive phenomenon, shaped by foreign pressures. He writes:

¹ See Ienaga Saburō, *The Pacific War 1931–1945*, (trans.) Frank Baldwin (New York, 1978); Edward Drea, *Japan's Imperial Army: Its Rise and Fall, 1853–1945* (Lawrence, 2009); and Danny Orbach, *Curse on This Country: The Rebellious Army of Imperial Japan* (Ithaca, 2017) for other books that emphasise the importance nineteenth-century developments for understanding the events of the 1930s and beyond.

Militarism was not a foregone conclusion. It was an ideology forged in the rush to lift Japan out of its unequal treaties, and to secure a ‘cordon of interest’ beyond its historical borders. It might have been diluted, or dispelled, had certain events not happened when they did—early, confidence-bringing victories against ill-matched opponents, dismissive foreign powers refusing to let Japan play by the rules of their own game, and a worldwide economic depression: desperate times that inspired desperate measures. (p. 15)

Indeed, there is evidence to support the ‘defensive militarism’ theory. For example, American gunboats that arrived in Tokyo Bay in 1853 and 1854 hastened the fall of the Tokugawa shogunate in 1868, demonstrating that nations with weak military capabilities were in fact at risk of destabilisation, or even foreign occupation (the example of China’s treaty ports was well known to the Japanese radicals who brought down the shogunate). It is also true that modern Japan conquered territory in order to build an overseas empire in Hokkaidō, Okinawa Prefecture, Taiwan, and Korea to secure buffer territory against the expansive Russian, American, Chinese, and European empire states. Again, Japan’s early major wars against the Qing (1894–95) and Russia (1904–05) were fought in order to block these adversaries from militarily occupying regions on Japan’s borders in north-east Asia. From this viewpoint, by 1906, Japan had become a world-class military power by adapting to an international reality that necessitated territorial aggrandisement, huge military budgets, and propensity to conduct pre-emptive warfare. Clements restates the defensive militarism thesis elsewhere in his introduction (pp. 14, 19), but the evidence presented in his individual chapters suggests that there is much more to the story.

Imperial Japan’s first major foreign war, which was fought in 1874 against Taiwanese villagers accused of murdering Okinawan castaways, was not a response to security threats, but rather the outcome of machinations for control of foreign policy among individuals and factions within Japanese ruling circles (pp. 38–44). Clements’s account of Japanese diplomatic and armed conflicts with Koreans for the two decades between 1873 and the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War in 1894 reveals that Japan’s Meiji-period (1868–1912) foreign adventures were also products of domestic political contests that had little to do with national defence (pp. 37–45). On the eve of the Sino-Japanese War, which was modern Japan’s debut on the world stage as a military power, ‘Foreign Minister Mutsu Munemitsu, hoping to rally the Japanese people into a nationwide distraction from politics and economic depression, doubled down on the military presence in Korea, advising his ministerial representative in Korea that the time had come to manufacture an excuse for war’ (p. 68). In fact, the Sino-Japanese War was less a ‘confidence-bringing victory against an ill-matched opponent’ (p. 15) than it was a war against a ‘fraction of China’s military manpower’ that ‘had maxed out [Japan’s] current military strength’ (p. 78).

Yes, Japan’s government acquired a large cash indemnity from the Qing after the war, but ‘much of that money was ploughed back into the military-industrial complex. Little of it trickled down to the common folk’ (p. 79). Moreover, the Sino-Japanese War took the lives of 36,000 Japanese citizens due to infectious diseases that were spread by returned soldiers. The death toll of the war from illness was 50 times the 1,000 Japanese men who were killed in action—and thousands also perished when conquering Taiwan, which was another supposed ‘spoils of victory’ (pp. 80–81). In a similar vein, the 1904–05 war against Russia, often celebrated in hindsight as proof of Japan’s successful militarisation, turns out upon closer inspection to have been immensely wasteful of Japanese blood and treasure, and a victory too narrowly achieved to be a source of Japanese hubris (p. 108).

In other words, it is not always helpful to think of ‘Japan’ as the historical protagonist in this story, because it was particular groups, factions, and individuals in Japan who

instigated and benefited from militaristic policies, often at the expense of other Japanese people. The first seven chapters of the book (including the introduction) are in fact primarily concerned with Japan's tumultuous social, political, and cultural history up to the 1920s. Clements explains how Japan's leaders, over the course of decades, entrenched the institutional and ideological structures that gave Japanese war-fighting in the Asia-Pacific War (1937–45) its distinctive characteristics. These attributes include the apotheosis of a reclusive and non-governing emperor as the titular apex of the chain of command, locus of state sovereignty, and object of popular veneration; the notion that the military was uniquely selfless and non-partisan, and thus beholden only to the imperial will (and not the constitution or civilian politicians); the doctrine of 'spirit over materiality', translated into the self-sacrifice of infantrymen and sailors as cornerstones of tactical planning; and a nationwide system of militarist infrastructure that included bases, ports, railways, telegraph lines, monuments to heroes, shrines to the war-dead, and school curricula infused with patriotic and martial content.

Clements's adaptation of sociologist Michael Mann's definition of 'militarisation' justifies the lavish attention he expends on matters such as statues, war songs, the advent of radio, and military funerals. Mann defines militarisation as an incremental process that affects broad swaths of a populace—it encompasses all ideological projects that normalise 'war and preparation for war' as 'desirable social activity' (p. 15). Without popular support, modern militaries cannot sustain wars that match the scale and duration that characterised Japan's participation in World War II. According to Clements, it is difficult for historians to assign precise dates for when Japan became sufficiently militarised to fight the Asia-Pacific War in the way in which it did. There is abundant evidence, however, to suggest that the tipping point was not reached until the late 1920s. From the 1870s through to the 1920s, mainstream politicians, mass-circulation newspapers, and national political parties openly opposed increased military budgets, foreign troop deployments, and xenophobic nationalism, often successfully. However, by the early 1930s, anti-militarist forces had exited the national political stage.

Many scholars attribute the sea change of 1930 to the global crisis precipitated by the stock-market crash of 1929. This crisis-narrative posits a sharp break between the militarist 1930s and the pacific 1920s. The dominant political and cultural motifs of the latter were democracy, diplomacy, and cosmopolitanism, in this view. Others, including Clements, argue that Japanese militarism merely reinvented itself in the 1920s; it remained a dynamic force even as elected officials trimmed the army's budget. As Clements explains: 'the militarily uneventful 1920s ... was a crucial period in turning the Imperial Japanese Army into the sinister institution that would dominate the 1930s' (p. 319). The key to the shift was the notion of 'total war' as it was formulated in response to the lessons that Japan's strategists took from World War I (1914–18). For them, the US steel embargo on Japan, severe disruptions to European trade, and the German populace's lack of resolve during the Great War all demonstrated that future wars would be won not only on the battlefield, but also in the arenas of economy and culture. In response, Japanese military officers, as soldiers and politicians, took measures to promote armed-force mechanisation, economic self-sufficiency, and a bellicose population (pp. 125–44).

In the 1920s, Japan's total-war adherents backed more aggressive policies to yoke China's economy to Japan, as part of their drive for autarky. This China policy exacerbated friction on the continent, which led to Japan's indirect meddling in Chinese politics and the creation of puppet states in Manchuria, North China, and the lower Yangtze in the 1930s. Militarists also redoubled ideological offensives to inculcate the citizenry with the values of patriotism, frugality, and self-sacrifice. As Clements put it: 'by 1937, it was too late—Japan had blundered into the middle of China's own civil conflict,

committing the entire nation to total war in an effort to be prepared for ... total war' (p. 17).

In the 1940s, the total-war mentality led Japanese geo-strategists to fear that German military victories against the Netherlands and France would bring the Third Reich to the Dutch East Indies and Indochina, potentially blocking Japanese access to Southeast Asian resources that could be used to achieve economic independence from the USA and the UK. The deal struck with Germany to prevent this outcome—the Tripartite Pact of 27 September 1940—provoked the Roosevelt administration's economic sanctions against Japan, which in turn confirmed Japanese suspicions that the USA was trying to starve the empire into submission. The resultant diplomatic impasse between Washington and Tokyo was the proximate cause of the Japanese attacks on Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941 (pp. 218–31).

Clements concludes his narrative of the war with brisk descriptions of Japan's string of tactical successes lasting into mid-1942, and its reversal of fortune from the Battle of Midway through to August 1945. His concluding chapter, entitled 'Merely human' after emperor Hirohito's famous declaration of non-divinity in the wake of Japan's surrender, discusses the Allied Occupation of Japan (1945–52). The strength of this book, and its contribution to military history, does not lie in its periodisation scheme, nor in its assignment of various causes and motives to Japan's military leadership and citizens. Rather, it is author Jonathan Clements's flair for rendering complex ideas into readable prose, coupled with his eye for little-known historical details that are relevant to the story of World War II, that make this book an apt introduction to the Asia-Pacific War, or a fascinating read for those who consider themselves to be experts. In addition, this volume includes informative colour illustrations of Japanese propaganda materials, as well as a comprehensive timeline and thoughtful 'further reading' section.

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Crossing Borders: Sinology in Translation Studies

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As a sequel to *Sinologists as Translators in the Seventeenth to Nineteenth Centuries* (2015), the present volume continues to investigate the relationship between translation studies and Sinology, but shifts its focus from linguistic aspects to cultural factors. With the vision of depicting how Chinese works were transmitted across cultural and linguistic borders through translation, this volume comprises 15 articles together with an exemplary introduction, and provides insights into a wide range of cultural aspects of translation in different genres: literature, religion, philosophy, politics, diplomacy, ritual, law, and science.

In the history of translation (from Chinese into European languages), the past half-millennium witnessed a transformation from 'heady hopes' to 'mundane realities'